

# Mr. Samuel Pepys

An Address delivered at St. Olave's, Hart Street,  
on May 27, 1927,

BY

SIR D'ARCY POWER, K.B.E., M.A.,  
M.B. Oxon, F.S.A.,

PRESIDENT OF THE SAMUEL PEPYS CLUB

*On behalf of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society.*

---

*From the Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological  
Society, N.S. Vol. v, Part iv, 1926.*

Printed by :

TITUS WILSON & SON, PRINTERS, 28, HIGHGATE.

1927.



## MR. SAMUEL PEPYS.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT ST. OLAVE'S, HART STREET,  
ON MAY 27TH, 1927,

BY

SIR D'ARCY POWER, K.B.E., M.A., M.B., Oxon., F.S.A.,

President of the Samuel Pepys Club,

*on behalf of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society.*

WE are met here to-day to do honour to the memory of Samuel Pepys, a great public servant, a man of infinite variety and a Prince amongst diarists.

He died on 26th May, 1703, just two hundred and fourteen years ago yesterday and was buried in this Church at nine o'clock on the night of June 4th in the vault on the north side of the Communion Table and below the monument which he had erected to the memory of his wife. The vault contains the bodies of his wife, interred Nov. 13, 1669, and of his brother John, buried there March 15, 1677. The monument, as you see, is in good preservation and is no doubt as faithful a portrait of Mrs. Pepys as the sculptor could make it for her husband would have taken endless pains to secure an excellent likeness. It is placed high on the wall because it was intended to be seen from the Admiralty pew, which was situated in a gallery in the south aisle just above the place where his own memorial now stands. The gallery was set up for the convenience of the Commissioners of the Navy and it was in this gallery that Pepys sat on the many occasions when he attended the services in the Church and was living in Seething Lane in which the chancel and churchyard are situated.

For more than one hundred years after his death Pepys was as though he had never been born, remembered only in a



dim fashion by the Fellows of Magdalene College, Cambridge, to whom he bequeathed his library: Fellows who are themselves worthy to be honoured in their generations because they maintained intact the trust committed to them even in times when it was not unusual to mutilate valuable books, to give them away or to transfer them from one library to another without any hope of their return.

When the hundred years had elapsed the Diary was transcribed and from that time onwards the fame rather than the reputation of Samuel Pepys grew steadily. The private details of this young man's life have somewhat overshadowed the real historical value of the contemporary and day to day account of what took place in London when the Puritan rule was replaced by a return to monarchy. Historians indeed have made use of his facts but parodists have copied his mannerisms and satirists have pointed to his morals forgetting in the Victorian age of prolonged peace that the morals of the Restoration were as much a product of the Great Rebellion as those of the present generation are of the Great War. Gradually a saner view was taken. The Rev. Alfred Povah, Rector of this Parish, proposed as early as 1864 that a monument should be erected in the Church to the memory of Samuel Pepys but the project was not carried into effect until 1884, when, on March 18th, the memorial, which you see, was unveiled by Captain Webb the Deputy-Master of the Trinity House, in the presence of the Honourable J. Russell Lowell who was then the United States Minister accredited to the Court of St. James.

We are less concerned on this occasion with Samuel Pepys the Diarist, than with Samuel Pepys, the man of affairs honoured by two Kings; honest, when judged by the standard of the times in which he lived; a great lover of music; a virtuoso who presided fittingly over the Royal Society at a period of intense scientific activity; the worthy friend of Sir Isaac Newton; of John Evelyn; of Dr. John Wallis the Oxford mathematician and of the Houblon family who did much to establish the Bank of England.

At one of the most deplorable periods in our naval history Samuel Pepys was constant in his endeavours to place the service upon a sound basis. Nepotism, corruption and the misappropriation of funds were rampant in the Navy when he became Clerk of the Acts. Pepys did his best to combat them. As far as in him lay he appointed men who had been trained at sea and discountenanced all nominations of inefficient commanders, of those who had bought their places, and of those who owned them to patronage. He preferred, in his own words, "rough tarpaulins" to "gentlemen commanders." By numerous personal visits to the shipyards at Deptford and Chatham he assured himself that the work of shipbuilding was not scamped and that the King was not defrauded in what was bought for the use of the Navy. He tried with all his might to get the seamen paid regularly rather than by a system of tickets which had often to be sold at a discount of thirty to forty per cent. His whole-hearted devotion to the service earned him the friendship and, so far as the Stuarts knew the term, the gratitude both of Charles II and James II. Indeed his known relationship to King James led to his final dismissal from the sphere of his life's work. He twice filled the important post of Secretary to the Admiralty, once for six years, once for five years and in this position he laid the foundations upon which the prestige of the British Navy was afterwards built.

His numerous duties first as Clerk of the Acts, then as Secretary to the Admiralty Commission and finally as Secretary for the affairs of the Admiralty of England by no means exhausted the energies of Pepys. Appointed a Governor of Christ's Hospital, better known to us as the Bluecoat School, he immediately set to work and organised a scheme by which boys who seemed suitable for a life at sea were selected and especially trained in a mathematical school. They were afterwards examined and certified by the Trinity house and a breed of pilots was thus reared to the great



advantage of the navigation of the King's ships. His interest in the Navy is also shown by his election as Master of the Trinity House in 1675. In that capacity he must have attended the annual service in this Church to which, as I have already said, he was no stranger for whilst he lived in the Navy Office in Seething Lane he attended the services regularly from the day in 1660 when the minister, Mr. Milles, "did begin to nibble at the Common Prayer by saying Glory be to the Father, etc., after he had read the two psalms and the people had been so little used to it that they could not tell what to answer." Mr. Milles therefore was fully justified in giving him a certificate when his religious principles were called in question and he was said to have papist tendencies. It was somewhat hard on Pepys that his religious principles should ever have been called in question. If there was one thing more than another upon which he might have prided himself, it was upon that which Mr. J. R. Tanner very properly calls his "pet establishment," the one of which he was certainly the only begetter—the department of naval chaplains. He pointed out in December, 1676, that "few Commanders take any Chaplains in his Majesty's ships and that when they do they are of a very undesirable character, whilst the poor seamen are obliged to contribute fourpence a month out of their pay whether they have any spiritual benefit or not from their ministrations." A year later the establishment of naval chaplains had been placed upon a sound footing and it was ordered that they should be licensed by the Bishop of London.

There is evidence in the Admiralty Library that Pepys left his mark upon the succeeding century as well as upon his own time. Dr. J. R. Tanner says that the prodigious respect paid to his authority by the naval administrators of the next generation led to a number of transcripts being made from the Pepysian manuscripts and preserved amongst the records of the Admiralty. And so durable was the tradition that the Commission which reported in 1805, when Pepys had

been dead for more than a hundred years, spoke of him as "a man of extraordinary knowledge in all that relates to the business of the Navy, of great talents and of the most indefatigable energy."

Pepys, too, was a good citizen who cheerfully undertook his share of the duties of public life. A member of the Clothworkers Company, he must have gradually worked his way up through the Court of Assistants until he was chosen Master and showed his goodwill by the noble presents which he made to the company and which are still exhibited with pride in their Hall. He took a leading part in the attempts to arrest the progress of the Great Fire, putting fresh heart into the exhausted Lord Mayor and using his influence with the Duke of York to have sufficient troops sent into the City to maintain the peace and assist the Citizens.

Pepys also left his mark at the Royal Society where he was President from 1684-1686. Many of his friends read papers before him whilst he occupied the Chair. Amongst them were Dr. Turberville, whom he had consulted about his failing sight seventeen years previously; the Rev. Dr. John Wallis whose portrait, painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller at the order of Samuel Pepys, now hangs in the Bodleian Library at Oxford; and Sir William Petty the political economist who built the double-keeled boat that out-sailed the Dublin packet. Many of the papers read before him dealt with subjects of which he had so intimate a knowledge that he must often have contributed valuable information in the course of the subsequent debate. There was for instance a communication "On the Size of London"; another upon "Experiments for trying the force of Great Guns"; another on "Magnetic Needles" and once Dr. John Wallis made remarks "On his own powers of memory." We may be sure that Mr. Pepys went home on that day and tried how far his own memory would serve him. Some of the papers may even have been due to his direct inspiration for they deal with



the disease from which he himself suffered and for the relief of which he had undergone a surgical operation.

During his term of office it became his duty as President of the Royal Society to give his imprimatur to the first edition of Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia*, one of the great world-books not only of his own epoch but of all time and every one who reads that marvellous book must naturally ask who was he who gave his official sanction to its publication. There is no reason to suppose that the Imprimatur was a mere formal act on the part of Mr. Pepys for he and Sir Isaac Newton were in friendly correspondence several years later and Halley, as one of Pepys' Secretaries at the Royal Society, must often have been an intermediary between the younger man and the President.

It is unnecessary to do more than draw attention to Pepys' love of music. It is known to everyone by his setting of "Beauty Retire" and "Gaze not on Swans." He played several instruments and the flageolet was his constant companion with which he whiled away many of the weary hours incidental to the leisurely mode of travelling which was the fashion of his day. He had a good ear and he was always willing to teach those whom he thought were teachable even, though as he himself confesses, they were not good-looking.

I have already spoken of the growth of the fame of Pepys in recent years. Some of us had already tried to keep his memory green at an earlier period. In 1903, on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of his death, four of us met together and determined to establish a Samuel Pepys Club the number of members being limited to seventy for at the age of 70 Pepys died. Mr. B. Wheatley was the moving spirit and he was ably seconded by Sir Frederick Bridge on the musical side and by Mr. Whale, a skilful and amusing speaker. The Club was successful from the beginning and is recruited after a process of careful selection, from the literary and musical circles of the country. We



meet two or three times a year, often by the kind permission of the Master and Wardens of the Clothworkers' Company in their Hall, where Pepys once presided as Master. Here we dine and afterwards enjoy such music as would have pleased him and listen to a short paper on some subject which would have interested him. The paper is frequently about some aspect of his own life for to that we are sure he would have listened most attentively. But the Club has wider objects in view than to eat, talk, and listen. It publishes a volume of Proceedings from time to time. A few years ago it cleaned and redecorated the frame of the portrait of the Rev. Dr. John Wallis at Oxford. More recently it has put into repair the house at Brampton, near Huntingdon, which had long been occupied by the Pepys family, where Samuel himself hoped to make a refuge for his old age. Lord Sandwich generously granted a long lease of the house to the Club and the Club has made it a fitting memorial to Samuel Pepys. It had degenerated by successive alterations and accretions into a very ordinary farmhouse. The genius of Mr. W. A. Forsyth, F.R.I.B.A., and the careful work of Mr. Allen, the Huntingdon Builder, who is proud of his illustrious fellow-townsmen has put the house back into the condition in which it was when Mr. Pepys' uncle, his father and himself were successively tenants and occupiers. The restoration has been carried out with very great care and no alteration has been made in the main features of the house. A recent addition has been removed, the modern fireplace in the hall has been taken out and the old brick hearth, mentioned by Pepys, has been revealed. The staircase has been replaced in its former position and it is now possible to go upstairs without risk to life or limb. "My brother's room" remains as it was when Pepys spent the greater part of an October night washing the money which his father and wife had buried so carelessly on that Sunday morning in June when there was fear of a Dutch invasion of London that, as Pepys says, "it put me into such trouble that I was almost mad

about it." There also is the large room where Mrs. Pepys and the maid occupied the great bed whilst Samuel had to content himself with the little truckle bed at the foot. The garden, too, remains as it was and it is easy to see not only the exact place where the money was buried but the very path up and down which Samuel and his father walked whilst they discussed how a husband was to be found for "Pall who now grows old and ugly." The Southern frontage has been enlarged and is bounded by the field path leading to the parish church and additional grounds have been secured for a tennis court and a garage. The restless spirit of Mr. Pepys would fully approve of both these additions and the car he would have housed in the garage would have saved him many a night's break of journey to and from London. Most of the cost of these alterations have been met by contributions from members of the Club and their friends but something has still to be paid and offerings will be thankfully received and faithfully applied to what we think is a very worthy object.

I do not intend to close this first commemoration service on a begging note so I will conclude by pointing out how admirably Mr. Sidgwick has summed up the character of Samuel Pepys when he said:—"Were the Diary non-existent and were no other source available a judgement of Pepys' character formed upon a consideration of the contents of his Library would reveal him to have been a man of great breadth of interest and catholicity of taste, an inquisitive scholar conversant with more languages than his own, and a person in whom a love of order and neatness in detail were paramount."

Such a man is worthy of remembrance and I think we have done well in meeting here to-day to commemorate his life.

---





CHURCH OF ST. OLAVE, HART STREET, IN THE TIME OF PEPYS.

From a unique sketch by George Robertson, 1781, 18 $\frac{3}{4}$  ins. x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$  ins.,  
in the possession of and by the kind permission of the Rector  
and the Churchwardens.



PEPYS' HOUSE AT BRAMPTON BEFORE ALTERATION.







